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Common Sense Government for San Jose




**A Plan for
Today and
the Future**

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**Councilmembers
Pat Dando &
David Pandori**



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**Common Sense
Government
for San Jose**



CITY OF SAN JOSÉ, CALIFORNIA

801 NORTH FIRST STREET
SAN JOSÉ, CA 95110-1797

February, 1996

Introduction

San Jose is a great city with a bright future. To keep it that way, we must stay focused on the basics that preserve our quality of life. It's time to make some common sense changes in San Jose government.

In this booklet you'll find lots of good ideas from people throughout the city. The suggestions in here are not ours. They're yours. We've taken the time to put them together because individually, these ideas haven't gotten very far. By putting them in writing we hope these ideas will get their proper focus. Over the next few months, we will be working hard to see them accomplished.

Some of these ideas cost money. Finding funding will be challenging. However, by changing priorities and cutting waste, we can find the funds.

Like you, we expect that City Hall would automatically do the simple, good things the city needs. But sometimes government needs some pushing. So, if you support getting these "common sense" ideas into place or if you want to get more involved, let us know.

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Table of Contents

Neighborhoods First!

The Basics.....	1
Sidewalk Repairs, Street Lights, Alleys, Street Reconstruction & Traffic Signals....	1
Better Public Safety.....	2
Expand Police Force and Number of Patrol Cars, Better Fire Equipment.....	2
Fixing the Garbage System.....	2
Better Yardwaste Pick-up, Streamline the Billing System.....	2
Better Street Sweeping Program, Spring Cleaning Day.....	3
Encourage Neighborhood Volunteerism.....	3
Helping Community Volunteers.....	3
City-Wide Day of Community Service.....	3
Visiting San Jose.....	4
Three Good Ideas for Our Youth.....	4
After-School Programs, Youth Endowment, School Centers.....	4

Fiscal Responsibility

Saving Money.....	5
Competition for City Services, Citizen Input on Efficiency.....	5
and Innovation, Cut Mandatory Spending on Public Art, and more!.....	5
Better Budgeting	
A Budget You Can Read, Public Input, and a Report Card on City Services.....	6

Political Reform

Campaign Reform.....	7
Shorten Elections, End Last Minute and "Officeholder" Fundraising.....	7
Easier Access to Campaign Donor Info.....	7
End Abuse of "Business" Contributions.....	7
Decrease Contribution Limits & Spending.....	8
Card Clubs -- Voter Control.....	8

Redevelopment Redirection

Complete Highway 87.....	9
No More General Fund Borrowing.....	9
Cheaper, Cleaner, Better Parking and a Shuttle.....	9
A New Focus on Small Businesses, A Couple Blocks of Shopping.....	10
A New Approach and Commitment to Housing.....	10

Closing

Neighborhoods First!

Our city is only as good as its weakest neighborhood. Every neighborhood, rich or poor, deserves the basics -- good streets, sidewalks and lighting. A well staffed police department and reliable fire equipment should be a right, not a controversy. We must do more to foster a sense of community and make youth a higher priority.

The Basics

City government is all about taking care of the things that are closest to you, especially when it comes to keeping neighborhoods safe and strong. The cost of providing the basics -- good streets, walkable sidewalks, more street lights, is expensive. But, the sooner we begin taking care of them, the sooner we'll be finished.

- **Sidewalk Repairs.** Only \$300,000 is budgeted this year for a backlog of sidewalk repairs that totals more than \$15 million. These funds will be used to pay one-third of sidewalk repair costs. Homeowners will pay the remaining two-thirds. The money runs out this year. It's time for the city to establish an on-going contribution to sidewalk repairs, especially given that city trees are responsible for most of the damage.
- **Street Lights.** Annual funding for streetlights has been sporadic, from \$ 0 to \$240,000. The five year average has been only \$72,000, far less than the \$9.6 million backlog. With regular funding, this problem is fixable.
- **Alleys.** Many city alleys have outlived providing access to backyards and garages. Instead, they've become a haven for drug dealing, gang activity, graffiti, and dumping. Police and Code Enforcement staff are often called to deal with crime or to pick up junk. We can save money by helping neighborhoods permanently close the worst alleys.
- **Street Reconstruction.** These are streets that need to be rebuilt. To resurface them would be a waste of money. In spite of a \$31 million dollar backlog, the city budgets \$ 0 on an annual

basis to fix the worst neighborhood streets. Some neighborhoods have waited more than 40 years for repairs. This is way, way too long.

- **Traffic signals.** The city funds **no more than six** new signalized intersections every year. Not surprisingly, the number of traffic signals on the waiting list is approximately 100. Traffic signals must keep up with growth of traffic.

Enhance Public Safety

- **Restore and Expand our Police Force.** San Jose has fewer police officers today than it did four years ago. Some police beats actually go unfilled. The city must commit to maintaining our first-rate police department by hiring sufficient staff to keep up with demand and filling vacancies without delay.
- **Officers with Patrol Cars.** The city does not have enough patrol cars for our current police force. As a result, officers double-up in one car covering two beats, instead of one. This increases response times and reduces police visibility in our neighborhoods. We must buy enough cars now, and more in the future.
- **Provide adequate fire equipment for all neighborhoods.** Some city fire trucks are so old that they can barely make it up the hills of the neighborhoods they are supposed to protect. Others have leaking water tanks. We should not risk the lives and property of residents and firefighters. The City must purchase essential firefighting equipment and maintain good back-up equipment.

Fix the Garbage System

- **A New System for Yardwaste Pick-Up.** In many neighborhoods, the current yardwaste system causes problems with scraped streets, early set-outs, clogged storm drains, loss of parking, and the need for hand sweeping after pick-up. There must be another way to collect yardwaste. Other cities have found alternatives. So can San Jose.

- **A Better Billing System.** The garbage system is costing the city more to run than anticipated. This is something better handled by an outside business. And, let's get rid of the rigid rules requiring charges for garbage service when no service is provided. In San Jose, a property that is vacant for 2-3 months due to death, long-term illness, extended vacation, etc., is not exempt from garbage fees. In fact, a \$7.00 fee is still required!
- **A Street Sweeping Program that Sweeps Streets.** Many neighborhoods are wondering why we even have a street sweeping program. More times than not, the street sweeper goes down the middle of the street because parked cars block the gutter. Some neighborhoods would be willing to have less frequent sweepings if they were combined with a real effort to prevent cars from parking on the street on sweeping day.
- **A Spring Cleaning Day.** Since the new garbage program began, illegal dumping has increased. Now, more than ever, we need an annual spring cleaning day when residents could unload bulky goods like couches and mattresses. Other cities have them. San Jose used to have one. We want ours back. It will save us money because it will reduce dumping in parks, empty lots and along streets.
- **Helping Community Volunteers.** San Jose residents want to be active and involved in their community. They have organized neighborhood associations, adopted parks and creeks, beautified streets with trees and have fought San Jose's graffiti problem. Volunteer activities are an investment that saves money, yet the city only budgets 70 cents per resident for volunteer support. Putting more money here would be returned a hundred-fold in our neighborhoods.
- **Establish a City-Wide Day of Community Service.** If we can capture the spirit of neighborhood activism that exists in

Encourage Community Volunteerism

our city and channel it into a day of community service, imagine what could be accomplished? This good idea shouldn't cost city government a cent.

- **Visit San Jose Neighborhoods.** Decisions affecting the city's neighborhoods should not be made behind a desk. Instead of city officials travelling to other cities, why not visit our own city? San Jose should regularly sponsor a visit of its own neighborhoods and business districts by city staff, business people and residents. What they find might be surprising.

A Commitment to our Youth

- **Quality After-School Programs at all Schools.** In a recent survey about youth needs, after-school programs were the top-rated desire of residents. Still, a significant number of our elementary schools aren't served by either the city or groups like the YWCA. These sites need after-school programs. For existing sites, a little more funding could add teachers to supplement recreation leaders. This would allow for education, not just recreation.
- **Establish a Youth Endowment.** In future years, we can anticipate that the needs of our youth will only increase. It's much cheaper to help youth and prevent juvenile delinquency than to spend money on courts and jails. The city can start saving today by setting aside 1% of our annual budget, and encourage the involvement of our business community. Families save for the future, why not government?
- **Schools as Community Centers.** A school is the natural hub of any community. Instead of building new youth and community centers, let's make better use of our schools. The city should put its money there instead of brand-new buildings. That way, our schools will be better too.

Fiscal Responsibility

Saving money needs to become a real priority. Opening up city services to competition is a good first step. An independent citizen's board aimed at saving money, would be another. The city's budget must be overhauled to allow ordinary people to find waste.

Saving Money

- **Open up city services to competition.** Many city services operate as a monopoly. Government must learn to function with the efficiency of a business. San Jose must develop a competitive process that allows the private and non-profit sector to compete directly with city staff. Whoever can provide the best service at the lowest cost should do the job.
- **Form a citizens board independent of city government on efficiency and innovation.** Many good ideas to save tax dollars are dismissed by City Hall insiders as unfeasible. Why not establish an on-going citizens board with real authority that studies and recommends ways to save taxpayers dollars and improve city services?
- **Cut mandatory spending on public art.** In the last five years, the city has spent over \$5 million on the public art program, including the \$500,000 "Plumed Serpent" sculpture downtown. The 1996 Public Art Workplan includes another \$4.03 million in arts spending. It's time to cut mandatory city funding of public art.
- **Other Ways of Saving Money...**

...Reduce the amount our Environmental Services Department spends on advertising -- currently \$2.8 million ...

...Require parents of kids caught painting graffiti to pay for the damages. This could help recoup some of the \$600,000 San Jose spends on graffiti clean-up...

...Eliminate rented office space for city departments which is currently costing \$1.5 million per year.

Better Budgeting

- **A Budget You Can Read.** San Jose residents would probably be surprised to know that they couldn't look at the city's budget and determine how much money was being allocated to a particular program or how it's being spent. The operating budget lists the changes that are being proposed, not what's already been funded in past years. It's time the city has a complete budget that describes existing programs in detail, changes proposed, and unfunded needs. This information exists. A new budget format would save time and be more accessible to the public.
- **Real Public Involvement.** Budget study sessions -- the most important meetings held during the budget -- should be moved to evening meetings and held in various locations throughout the city. Right now, public involvement in the city's budget tends to be either too early (when no decisions are being considered) or too late (when decisions have already been made.) The public needs to be involved all the way through. It's time that the city make public presentations on the city budget at council meetings held in neighborhoods throughout the city. This shouldn't be difficult. The meetings can be held at schools, libraries or community centers.
- **A Report Card on City Services.** How well is San Jose providing basic services to its customers? Is a department doing its job? Although the current budget format includes "performance measurements," they provide few clues as to the real job being done. We need to set standards for work quality and we need a mechanism to make sure these standards are being met.

Political Reform

People want to make campaigns shorter and less expensive, reduce the influence of special interests, and make it easier to understand where campaign money comes from. Political reform also means giving voters control over card clubs in San Jose.

Campaign Reform

- **Shorten Elections.** Candidates can start campaigning for office now 12 months before election day. That means more expensive campaigns and more time for incumbents to raise money and discourage competition. We think campaign fundraising should be limited to 3 months before election day.
- **End Last Minute Fundraising.** Right now, candidates can continue to raise money right up to election day and one month beyond. Fundraising should stop at least a week before election day, so people have a real chance to see where election money comes from before election day.
- **Stop “Officeholder” Fundraising.** The Mayor and the Council can raise money from special interests for “office” expenses at the same time issues affecting those interests are up for votes. The voters of San Francisco abolished this. San Jose should too.
- **Make It Easier to Learn about Campaign Money.** No ordinary person can figure out where campaign money comes from. The forms are pages long and only available through the city clerk’s office, during working hours. Candidates should report their contributions electronically and the city should put them on-line.
- **Require contributions from individuals, not businesses.** Allowing contributions by businesses creates the potential for a single individual to make several contributions hidden through several different businesses. A single individual should be limited to making a single contribution.

- **Decrease Contribution Limits and Reduce Spending.** Since 1980, the city has limited contributions to \$250 per person for city council candidates and \$500 for candidates for mayor. Even so, campaign spending per election has more than doubled in the last 15 years. Yet, some are talking about increasing contribution limits. Contribution limits should be lowered to \$100 to reduce campaign spending and to encourage contributions from a wider group of people.

Card Clubs

- **Give Control over Card Clubs to the Voters.** The Mercury News has reported that San Jose card clubs are among the largest, if not the largest, contributors to campaigns for mayor and city council. The money is so plentiful and easy that candidates for office continued to take thousands of dollars from local Card Club officials after those individuals had been indicted for skimming, tax evasion, laundering and illegal campaign contributions. Not surprisingly, pending the criminal trial, city officials voted to change laws regulating the club, that then generated millions of dollars in new profits. Subsequently, card club officials were convicted of their criminal charges, but had new-found profits to pay their fines.

The people of San Jose need to take control of the card clubs. Through their campaign contributions, the card clubs have not lost any vote or favor they sought from the council. Let the people who don't get campaign contributions -- the voters -- decide the fate of card clubs in San Jose.

Redevelopment Redirection

Redevelopment dollars should be invested in projects that create jobs, expand our city tax base, improve highways, and support small businesses in downtown and our neighborhoods. Spending millions of dollars on theaters and public art should be a low priority.

- **Fund and Accelerate Completion of Highway 87.** We've seen the importance and convenience of Highway 87 now that it has opened south of Highway 280. We also see the traffic congestion and delay with the unfinished leg north of downtown (Taylor to 101). The City Council dropped the funding needed to finish Highway 87 from the last redevelopment budget. This funding should be restored and the project should be accelerated.
- **No More General Fund Borrowing.** When there was a downturn in the redevelopment budget last year, the City Council looked toward "borrowing" money from the city's general fund — money that's used for police, fire protection, and other basic services. The City Council should have considered cutting expenses, just like all of us must when we have less money. General fund money should always be off limits.
- **Cheaper, Cleaner, Better Parking and a Shuttle.** The city should follow merchants' suggestion for a free hour of parking in garages downtown. It's simpler and better than the current validation program. The city should roll back the parking fines that were increased last year to generate more money for the city. Higher fines can only hurt business and turn people away from the downtown. All the parking garages should be clean and well-lit and the signage should be improved. Street parking should be increased too. Work must begin now on a new parking garage.

And we must work with businesses to operate a downtown shuttle. It works great for the arena. A shuttle will link the

convention center, university and arena with small businesses downtown. This will help relieve parking demand.

- **A New Focus on Small Businesses.** The city must examine everything it does that affects small businesses in San Jose, and not just those in the downtown. Permits, fees and regulations affect small businesses differently than large ones. The time has come to give a special review of the things the city can do to improve the business climate for small businesses, not just the large ones.
- **A Couple Blocks of Shopping.** A downtown should have a unique shopping environment. Downtown San Jose still doesn't have two consecutive blocks of shopping. If we make this a priority, it can be accomplished.
- **A New Approach and Commitment to Housing.** Housing construction still remains slow in the downtown. The Redevelopment Agency hasn't achieved even 20% of the goal of 4,000 housing units downtown by the year 2000. The Agency can't continue its current strategy of large subsidies. It's costly and there just isn't enough money. We must develop a new strategy, one less focused on subsidies and more focused on creating jobs and making the neighborhoods near downtown more desirable.

...

Closing

Over the next several months, we'll be working on these issues. If any of these topics interest you, let us know. By working together, we can improve the quality of life and fiscal well-being of San Jose.

...

Your Input is Needed!





What do you think? We'd like to hear your thoughts on these issues...

What topic(s) are you most interested in?

Would you like to get involved and/or be kept informed about the progress on these issues?

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Please mail to:

Council District 3 or 10
801 North First St., #600
San Jose, CA 95110

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"It's time for San Jose to take care of the basic things that improve our neighborhoods."

Jane Elkins

Neighborhood President



"The ideas in this plan will make San Jose citizens know that the city cares about the quality of their life."

Hieu Tran

Together Against Gambling



"If the city and agency were held accountable, the issues raised in this booklet could be resolved."

Ray Moreno

Guadalupe Washington
Neighborhood Association



"These ideas will make government smarter and a better value for the taxpayer."

Dave Fadness

Businessman/Community
Leader

Common Sense Checks

- ✓ Dollars San Jose budgets annually for reconstruction of neighborhood streets: \$0
- ✓ Number of new traffic signals funded by San Jose per year: 6
- ✓ Number of traffic signals on the waiting list: Approximately 100
- ✓ Change in number of San Jose police officers from 1992 to 1995: Minus 40
- ✓ Change in San Jose population from 1992 to 1995: +38,246
- ✓ Elementary schools in San Jose without a city funded after-school program: two-thirds
- ✓ Discounted price for garbage service if you're dead or in the hospital: \$7.00
- ✓ Dollars San Jose spent on street lights over the last 5 years: \$360,000
- ✓ Dollars San Jose spent on public art over the last 5 years: \$5 million
- ✓ Number of months before election day that incumbents can begin raising money for re-election: 12
- ✓ Amount given by Card Clubs to candidates for City Council and Mayor since 1981: Over \$200,000
- ✓ Number of times since 1981 that the City Council has denied a Card Club request: 0
- ✓ Dollars cut by the Redevelopment Agency last year for the completion of Highway 87: \$10 million

